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**A DECISION DISTINCT  
FROM WHAT ANYONE INTENDED**

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Committee 9  
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This is a case study of bureaucratic politics -- a paradigm in which organizational and self-interest drives senior policy-makers rather than an objective appreciation of the issue.

I will analyze this case by answering several questions:

- What was the issue?
- Who were the actors?
- What was the organizational interests?
- What were the decisions?
- How was the game played?
- What was the conclusion?

#### THE ISSUE

In January of 1988, the Deputy Chief of Staff of Personnel for Headquarters, Military Airlift Command wrote a letter that stated:

Manning levels of our line colonels and colonel selects are 126 percent Air Force - wide, with MAC at 150 percent. We now have nearly 200 more colonels in the command than authorized colonels' billets and the situation is getting worse....<sup>1</sup>

This letter got into the hands of congress. As a result, they drafted language in the House and Senate Conference Report for the FY90/91 Authorization Act:

The Secretary of Defense is authorized to utilize the 250 Air Force colonel authorizations that were withdrawn by sec. 403 of the National Defense Authorization Act in Fiscal Year 1989 (Public Law 100-456) and that would be withdrawn by section 402 of

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<sup>1</sup> Colonel Donald Post, USAF, "MAC Colonel Resource," Headquarters, Military Airlift Command letter, 8 Jan 1988

this Act to temporarily provide increases in grade limitations among the military services in fiscal years 1990 and 1991 as he considers appropriate. The conferees intend that this authority be applied to relieve nurse retention problems caused by promotion flow that is less than experienced in the line officer communities in the military Services, and to relieve promotion congestion problems in the line officer community such as are being experienced in the Marine Corps...<sup>2</sup>

The issue for the Secretary of Defense was how to utilize the temporary increases of field grade authorizations among the military services with out exceeding Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA) promotion levels. Congress released the Conference Report during a time when the services were experiencing various promotion problems. The Air Force had reduced the Officer Corps 8% from 1986 levels, and the loss of 250 colonel positions increased the average promotion pin-on points by 1 to 2 months. In the Navy, requirements for field grade (LtCmdr - Capt) nurses were much lower than DOPMA would authorize. To maintain a reasonable promotion opportunity and timing in the Nurse Corps, the Navy was assigning more field grade positions to nurses than requirements justified. While the Marine Corps only took a .6% reduction of officers from 1986 levels, increased retention and low attrition caused a 10% decrease in promotion opportunity for majors through colonels. Pin-on points -- especially for the grade of major -- increased

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<sup>2</sup> "FY 90/91 DoD Authorization Act," Congressional Record - Senate, 6 Nov, 1989, p. 127

the average promotion two full years above DOPMA approved levels. The Army had promotion problems similar to the Marine Corps.

### **THE ACTORS**

The actors in this issue represent the Marine Corps (USMC), U.S. Navy (USN), U.S. Air Force (USAF), the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and Congress.

Marine Corps actors included action officers (AO's), department heads, and the Commandant. The Officer Promotion Planner was the AO for this issue. He was a manpower analyst trained at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. Very experienced with DOPMA, he was responsible for developing the size of promotion zones. He perceived the congressional report as "gospel," and saw an opportunity to solve Marine Corps promotion stagnation problems. He was an organizational participant genuinely concerned for the health of the Corps. He had the main role in developing an argument around quantitative results.

The Director, Manpower Policy (MP), was the main actor for the Marine Corps. He had an advanced degree in physics and had served on the Joint Staff in Washington, D.C. He was new to the bureaucracy of the service headquarters, and to manpower issues in general. But he was a quick study and a workaholic. He perceived the issue as an opportunity for personal ambition. He was a climber who believed he could accomplish any mission or task. He involved himself in all issues, even those not

belonging to the Manpower Department. Powerful, he was close to the Commandant, and he saw every issue as an opportunity to improve his chances for promotion.

The Navy actors all played minor roles in this issue as did the Secretary of the Navy. The main actor was the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA). She had only been on the job a few months. An organizational participant, her primary concern was the health of the Navy Department.

The Air Force actor was the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower, Reserve Affairs, Installations and Environment (MRAI&E). (His background is unknown because an interview was not possible.)

OSD actors worked in the office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Management and Personnel (FM&P). The key players were an AO in Manpower Management and Personnel Policy (MM&PP), and the Assistant Secretary of Defense (FM&P).

The AO was an experienced officer having worked in (MM&PP) for a 3 years. His perception of the situation was that the House and Senate report language was clear, and the issue should be fairly straight forward. He was a player and conserver - believing that this issue would be routine.

The ASD (FM&P) was the key actor in OSD. He was new to the job. He came from the Center of Naval Analysis (CNA) where he was the

Department Head for Manpower Studies. He had extensive knowledge of the Navy and Marine Corps Manpower systems. A senior participant, politically astute, he was a climber. This would be the first issue he would decide as the ASD (FM&P).

Congressional actors included Mr. Pang and Mr. Panaro of the congressional staffs. Mr. Panaro is a member of the Marine Corps Ready Reserve.

#### **THE ORGANIZATIONAL INTERESTS**

The organizational interests for the Marines, Navy, and Air Force were the same. They all pursued an independent approach, preserving their service's morale and loyalty, while decreasing their service's budget.

OSD directed its effort at maintaining or improving its role as the leader of the services. DoD was working to decrease its budget also.

#### **THE DECISIONS**

The goal of the Marine Corps' strategy was to get 200 field grade authorizations. The Corps' analysis showed that the use of 200 authorizations during FY90/91 would dramatically lower promotion flow points, particularly in the grade of major. They expected the other 50 going to the Navy Nurse Corps as written in the report. The plan was to have the SECNAV go directly to the SECDEF with a memorandum requesting allocation to the Department of the Navy. The Director, MP knew the Army was neutral on the

issue. He believed it was politically unsound for the Air Force to ask for the allocation back, and he considered them a weak opponent.

The Navy didn't develop a strategy for this issue. They knew that the problem of the Navy Nurse Corps was more self-induced than a problem with DOPMA grade tables. Thus, the Navy decision was to support the Marine Corps' strategy.

The Air Force's goal was to "roll down" the temporary colonel reductions into the grades of lieutenant colonel and major. This would allow them to continue their promotion plans for FY90/91. Their strategy was to work with the OSD staff through the ASAF (MRAI&E). Their approach was to convince OSD to refrain from distributing the 250 allocations, and conduct a comprehensive review of the DOPMA grade tables. They knew the Army would be neutral, saw OSD (RM&S) as an ally, and the Marine Corps as the opponent.

#### **THE GAME**

In early October '89, the Director, MP requested the Officer Plans section to provide any issues he might want to fight. He received a brief on information that the congressional report might take 250 field grade authorizations from the Air Force, and provide language that the allocations should go the Marine Corps and Navy Nurse Corps. The Director called Mr. Pang and Mr. Panaro to confirm the information, and to discuss a strategy for the Marine Corps.



On 19 October 1989, the Director signed a memorandum going to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Resource Management and Support (RM&S): it read, "... We understand that additional field grade authorizations may become available to the SECDEF. If true, we request that consideration be given to allocating a portion of these authorizations to the Marine Corps...."<sup>3</sup> DASD (RM&S) replied there were none forthcoming and the Corps' must work within the constraints of DOPMA. The Director didn't like the answer and wrote a note to the AO, "Remember, in Wash D.C., "no" is just an interim response." Later, the Director, MP called the DASD (RM&S) and told him what Mr. Panaro intended. The DASD (RM&S) said he thought he could help the Corps. (He also happened to have a request for a Marine Major to support the "Goodwill Games," and asked if the Director, MP could help.)

On 12 Dec 89, the Director, MP and his Officer Planner went to brief the Secretary of the Navy on the FY90/91 Promotion Plan. The Under Secretary took the brief. The brief on promotion zones for the grade of major alarmed the Under Secretary. The Director, MP took this "window of opportunity" to describe the Marine Corps' problem with the DOPMA grade tables, and how a temporary fix could work if the Marine Corps got the 250 field grade allocations held by OSD. The Director, MP articulated the Corps' position:

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<sup>3</sup> Director MP, "Field Grade Officer Authorizations," Memorandum for the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (RM&S), 19 Oct 89, p.1

The Marine Corps needs an increase in the grade tables to meet mission requirements, and to promote captains, majors, and lieutenant colonels within the Congressional guidelines for opportunity and timing as established under the (DOPMA).<sup>4</sup>

After a lengthy discussion, the Under Secretary told the Director, MP to, "give me a battle to fight." The Director, MP seized this event as an opportunity to pursue the 250 allocation.

For the next five weeks, the AO and Director laid ground work to formalize a request to the Secretary of Defense. The goals were:

- identify the other service's positions on the issue
- develop a memorandum for the Secretary of the Navy to the Secretary of Defense requesting the 250 authorizations
- coordinate informally with Marines in the SECDEF's office so they can help push the issue through

The Officer Planner contacted service AO's to gain information on what the service's positions were. The Army knew it would be executing a very large officer reduction -- they were not a player in this issue.

Initial contacts with the Navy said they had minor interest in the 250 -- and they would support the Marine Corps getting all 250. Later discussions, however, proposed that giving 200 allocations to the Marine Corps and 50 to the Navy was a stronger position: the split supported the report language, it was a

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<sup>4</sup> Officer Plans, "Temporary Increase in Officer Grade Limitations," Talking Paper for the Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, 12 Dec 89, p. 1

Department of the Navy position, and it had a better chance of getting support from the Secretary of the Navy.

The Air Force believed that the report language was inappropriate. While they were illusive in discussions with the Marines about the issue, it was clear they were unaware of the Marine Corps' initiative to request the 250 allocations. However, the Corps' inquiry alerted the Air Force to develop a position on the issue.

As an important side note, during this period, the DASD (RM&S) changed from a Naval Officer to an Air Force Officer. The Marines would realize the significance of this event after the announcement of the final decision by ASD (FM&P).

On 24 Jan 90, the Commandant of the Marine Corps prepared a memorandum for the SECNAV with a proposed letter to SECDEF requesting authorization for the 250 allocation. Key points of the Commandant's memo were:

- 200 authorizations dramatically lower promotion flow points for the Corps
- 50 authorizations reduce promotion flow points for the Navy Nurse Corps
- There is funding to support the measure

Upon receipt of this memorandum, the SECNAV Staff reviewed the issue and recommended approval to the Secretary. In February, Secretary Garrett approved the Corps' request and sent it to OSD for action.

As OSD processed the paperwork, the Director, MP changed his strategy in hopes to force the hand of OSD to approve the Corps' request. There was a report to the Senate and House Armed Services Committees due on 1 March 90 requiring service positions on the adequacy of the DOPMA grade table distributions. It was February, and OSD had not begun to prepare the report. The Director, MP used the report as a vehicle to force the 250 issue. On 21 Feb 90, the Marine Corps sent their report to OSD -- a blind copy was hand delivered to Mr. Pang and Mr. Panaro.

On 8 March 90, ASAF (MRAI&E) sent a memorandum to OSD stating the Air Force's position on the 250 issue. His points were:

- reduction of 250 colonel authorizations is temporary
- under DOPMA, "roll down" of colonel to lieutenant colonel and major is authorized, and we can continue in grade plans for FY90/91
- authority for SECDEF to use 250 authorizations is permissive, not mandatory, and if used by SECDEF, USAF can't "roll down"
- temporary reallocation is contrary to stable promotion management and places OSD in position of being the annual "broker" between the services for their promotion plans.

The Air Force recommendation was for OSD to refrain from distributing any grades to the other services, and as soon as possible, conduct a comprehensive review of the grade tables as requested by Congress.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> ASAF (MRAI&E), "Reallocation of Congressionally Reduced Grade Ceiling - Action Memorandum," Memorandum for Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management and Personnel), 8 March 90, p. 1

The OSD (MM&PP) staff prepared a decision paper for ASD (FM&P). The staff stated that it was only perception that the Air Force had too many colonels, and that the House and Senate conferees developed the language because of lobbying efforts by the Navy and Marine Corps. They developed four options for the ASD (FM&P):

- Option 1 SECDEF retain 250 authorizations, including the Air Force "roll down."
- Option 2 SECDEF retain 250 authorizations, but allow Air Force "roll down."
- Option 3 Allocate 200 authorizations to Marine Corps -- retain 50 for future use, as required.
- Option 4 Allocate 100 authorizations to Marine Corps, allow the Air Force to "roll down" 100 colonel authorizations to lieutenant colonel and major, and allocate 50 authorizations to the Navy Nurse Corps. (Or, retain the 50 authorizations for Navy nurses for future use, as required.)

The staff recommended option 3.<sup>6</sup>

DASD (MM&PP) gave the decision paper to DASD (RM&S) for comment before giving it to ASD (FM&P). DASD (RM&S) recommended to SECDEF to keep 250 but allow the Air Force to "roll down." He reasoned that this option would keep the Secretary from being in a position of being the annual "broker" between the services, and it would maintain morale for all service members.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> DASD (MM&PP), "Allocation of 250 Air Force Colonel Position," Memorandum for ASD (FM&P), 3 April 90, p. 3

<sup>7</sup> DASD (RM&S), "Reallocation of Congressionally Reduced Grade Ceiling," Memorandum for Assistant Secretary of Defense, Force Management and Personnel, 20 May 90, p.1

On 8 June 90, ASD (FM&P) published his decision. He wrote, "...I have decided against allocating the 250 to any Service. I have also decided that these positions should not be "rolled down" in the Air Force...The future of the force is still under debate and distribution of these positions at this time is not in the best interest of the Department, even for the nursing retention problems and Marine Corps promotion stagnation identified in the Conference Report...DOPMA contains enough management flexibility to deal with the immediate issues...."<sup>8</sup>

The Director, MP couldn't believe the decision. He believed the ASD (FM&P) didn't understand the grade table problem, and stated, "nothing we could write in reclama would help." He concluded by saying, "Fred Pang will fix the problem for us and OSD won't be happy -- especially ASD (FM&P).

After the decision, the Air Force told OSD that they would continue to "roll down" the authorizations -- an issue the SECDEF would personally resolve.

#### THE CONCLUSION

This is a clear case of bureaucratic politics. The nature of the issue permitted basic disagreement concerning what ought to be done -- primarily because analyses yielded conflicting recommendations. The Air Force and Marine Corps were pulling in

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<sup>8</sup> ASD (FM&P), "Temporary Increase in Officer Grade Limitations," Memorandum for ASN (M&RA) and ASAF (MRAI&E), 8 June 90, p. 1

different directions and this resulted in a decision distinct from what anyone intended.

The result was a political decision, not a solution to the issue. ASD (FM&P) came to his job with baggage in tow; he had been part of the Department of the Navy for 17 years. This was his first decision as ASD (FM&P). His understanding of manpower issues convinced him the Air Force used flawed reasoning. Conversely, while he recognized the benefit of the 250 to the Department of the Navy, he knew that the temporary nature of the fix provided him enough justification to hold the allocations from the Services all together. If he had sided with the Navy and Marine Corps, opponents would accuse him of cronyism. He had to prove to the SECDEF that he was an honest broker to all the Services and that he could stand the heat in his kitchen for unpopular decisions. The group of actors -- as separate individuals with different intentions -- gave enough pieces of the issue to compose an outcome distinct from what anyone would have chosen: unless you were the new ASD (FM&P) making your first decision.